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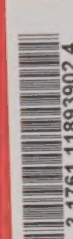
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Ontario
Women's
Directorate

4th floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1C2
(416) 965-7785

435 James Street S.
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7E 6E3
(807) 475-1691



CA20N
L22
-W01
ENG



Ontario
Women's
Directorate

Honourable Ian Scott,
Attorney General and
Minister Responsible
for Women's Issues

Women in the Labour Force "Fact & Fiction"

No. 1 in a series of fact sheets produced by
The Ontario Women's Directorate

INTRODUCTION

The number and proportion of women in the Ontario labour force has increased dramatically in the past twenty-five years. In 1960, women made up only 28%¹ of the total workforce; by 1984 this figure had increased to 43.4%.² In 1960 there were 663,000 women in the labour force. By 1984, the number of Ontario women working had increased to over 2 million. Economists predict that by the year 2000, close to half the people working in Ontario will be women.³

TABLE ONE
Women in the Ontario Labour Force
and their Participation Rates⁴

Number	Participation Rates
663,000	1960 31.4%
1,106,000	1970 41.4%
1,818,000	1980 54.3%
2,026,000	1984 57.0%

Although the participation rate of women has increased significantly, many misconceptions about working women persist. Such beliefs must be corrected if women are to receive equal treatment in the labour force.

Many myths about the role of women in the labour force can be either directly or indirectly connected to the assumption that women are "secondary" workers. Some people feel that the contribution made by working women to the economy and their families is less important than that of working men. A further supposition is that women are not truly dependent on employment income and, therefore, do not suffer unduly if unemployed.

Many women have access only to "secondary" jobs: those which are part-time, those with lower salaries, temporary or seasonal jobs or jobs with little or no opportunity for advancement. These jobs are not necessarily preferred by working women, but, rather, are the only ones available to them.

THE MYTH: "Secondary" workers make a smaller contribution and are not as important to the economy because they earn less than "primary" workers.

THE FACTS:

- 39.4% of married women in the Canadian labour force with children under 6 years in 1983 had husbands who earned less than \$20,000 a year. These women are making an important and essential contribution to the family income.⁵
- It is estimated that the number of poor families in Canada would almost double if women in two-partner families left the labour force.⁶
- 38.5% of working women in Ontario are single, widowed or divorced. These women are working to support themselves, and, in many cases, dependents as well.⁷

Women do earn, on average, less than men. This does not mean, however, that their wages are not essential. The salaries, not the women, are secondary.

THE MYTH: "Secondary" workers have no real commitment to working - they regularly move in and out of the labour force.

THE FACTS:

- Increasingly, women remain in the labour force following marriage and motherhood. Among women who do leave, a majority re-enter the labour force when their children are in school. Such women have a work-life expectancy of approximately 25 years despite their break in employment. The working woman who does not experience any significant break in employment will spend as many years in the labour force as a man - 45 years!⁸
- 59.1% of women in Ontario with children under the age of six were in the labour force in 1984. Although some women leave the labour force to raise their children, many do not.⁹
- In 1984, 251,623 women in Ontario were heads of one-parent families and 155,000 of these women were in the labour force.¹⁰
- In 1984, 40% of women who left their jobs did not do so voluntarily. Most were laid off, although a very small percentage were fired . . .¹¹
- Women are often especially vulnerable to layoffs since many are not unionized and/or have less seniority than male co-workers.

THE MYTH: Women work only for frills.

THE FACTS:

Women work for the same reasons as men – economic necessity, personal satisfaction and enrichment.

In Ontario, in 1984, 38.5% of the female labour force was single, widowed or divorced.¹² These women are working to support themselves and, in many cases, their families as well; they are not working for “pin money”.

Female lone parents, for example, are one of the most disadvantaged groups in our society. In 1983, the average income for a female-headed family in Canada was \$19,662, while male-headed families had an average income of \$36,578.¹³ 49.1% of female-headed single parent families fall into the low-income category.¹⁴

Financial necessity has played a major role in the dramatic increase in participation of married women in the labour force. Many married women work outside the home because one income is often no longer sufficient to maintain their standard of living.

THE MYTH: Women workers are not disadvantaged.

THE FACTS:

In 1984 58.4% of Canadian women in the labour force were clustered in clerical, sales and service occupations, jobs which are generally low paid.¹⁵ The clerical sector alone contains almost 1/3 of all employed women in Canada. At the same time, women are severely under-represented in most other occupational groups. For example, 8.6% of all working women were in the managerial and administrative category in 1984 compared with 12.6% of all men.¹⁶

In addition to working in only a small number of occupations, many women continue to be financially disadvantaged. In 1982 women working full-time in Canada earned 62.2% of what men earned. Women earned on average \$15,910 and men \$25,562.¹⁷ This discrepancy holds true even for occupations where the majority of workers are female.

TABLE TWO Average Weekly or Hourly Wages For Ontario Workers – 1983 ¹⁸			
Occupation	Female	Male	Female as % of Male ¹⁹
Secretary, Sr.	\$378	\$390	96.9%
File Clerk	263	308	85.4%
Restaurant Chef and Cook – General	5.36	5.59	95.9%
Full-time Sales Clerk, Retail Food Stores	11.25	12.12	92.8%

The impact of low wages and reduced benefits on working women does not end with their retirement from the labour force. In 1983 32.3% of women aged 65 and over were in the low income range²⁰ and over half the elderly women in Canada lived on less than \$7,000.²¹

THE MYTH: Women don't have the qualifications for better paying jobs.

THE FACTS:

A common misconception regarding women in the labour force is that they have only recently achieved the educational levels necessary for many jobs in our society. This misconception, although used to rationalize historical inequities in the distribution of employment opportunities between males and females, is not supported by objective evidence. The 1951 Census revealed that fewer women than men in Canada had no formal education, that more women than men had between 9 and 12 years of schooling and that approximately the same percentage of men and women had more than 13 years of formal education.²²

Today, women workers are, in fact, somewhat better educated than their male counterparts. For example, a higher percentage of women than men have more than a grade nine education. In Ontario, in 1984, 52.8% of women and 49.6% of men had completed high school. An additional 11.3% of women and 10.3% of men received some post-secondary education, but did not graduate. 14.4% of women and 11.3% of men received a post-secondary degree or diploma and 12.1% of women and 15.0% of men had completed university.²³

However, women have been excluded from many occupations and training opportunities for which they have always had the basic entrance qualifications. These occupations, although not necessarily highly skilled, often pay substantially higher wages than the “traditional” jobs held by women.

A 1980 study of 1976 post-secondary graduates revealed substantial sex differences in employment status. For example, more than 40% of women with business diplomas were clerks while more than 50% of men with similar qualifications were in management or sales.²⁴

Despite the steadily increasing participation rate of women in Canada's labour force and despite their increased educational attainment, many women continue to be employed in occupational “ghettos”.

THE MYTH: Women re-entering the labour market are unskilled.

THE FACTS:

Women who have left their jobs in order to raise children often encounter serious difficulties when attempting to re-enter the labour market. Many such women are required to accept semi-skilled or unskilled entry level jobs regardless of prior experience and training.

It is incorrect to assume that women who have been working in the home have lost or neglected their employment-related skills. In many cases they have not only retained previously acquired skills, but have expanded them through further education and training. Employers should, therefore, consider the skills acquired through unpaid labour in the home and volunteer sector and through educational and professional activities as well as those gained through previous work experience. Consideration must also, of course, be given to any specific training preparations made for re-entry.

The assumption that women re-entering the labour force are only capable of performing entry level jobs is unfair to the women themselves and is a serious neglect of a valuable talent pool.

THE MYTH: Women can't do “men's” jobs.

THE FACTS:

The idea that there are “men's” jobs and “women's” jobs is a culturally defined one based on tradition and not on inherent ability. During World War II women performed many jobs in areas now considered suitable only for men. For example, they were welders, riveters and truck drivers. For many occupations the vast potential of female workers has yet to be tapped. The incentives of higher wages, secure employment and the acquisition of marketable and specialized skills make careers in “non-traditional” fields, such as the skilled trades, engineering and management increasingly attractive to women.

THE MYTH: Married women take jobs away from men. They ought to quit these jobs and leave the labour force.

THE FACTS:

A study by the Canadian Department of Finance suggests that women workers will continue to add significantly to labour force growth in the 1980s which in turn will create an increase in the production of goods and services.²⁵ Working women help the economy prosper! Furthermore, if the demographic forecasts of a decreased male labour pool in the 1980s are realized, Canada could face serious labour shortages. The continued increase in female labour force participation will, therefore, play a crucial role in the future economic development of the country.²⁶

In 1984 there were 1,246,000 married women in the Ontario labour force. In the same year there were 229,000 unemployed men.²⁷ If all the married women left the labour force today and their jobs were taken by unemployed men, 1,017,000 jobs would remain empty. Furthermore, it is incorrect to assume that unemployed men necessarily have the skills, education or experience to readily fill jobs vacated by women.

THE MYTH: The increased presence of women in the labour force has contributed to a decline in productivity levels.

THE FACTS:

Job performance or productivity levels can be linked to many factors – experience, length of service, job satisfaction and successful job matching, but not to sex! To view women as being any less efficient or productive than men is to succumb to an outmoded prejudice that is not supported by objective evidence.

Indeed, if there are differences in job performance between women and men, it is that women work longer and harder than men! A study conducted by the University of Michigan indicates that the average man uses 52 minutes per day for scheduled coffee breaks, relaxing and extra lunch time. The average employed woman spends 35 minutes per day in these activities. The study also notes that according to the work effort scale used, women put in an effort equal to 112% of that by men.²⁸

With respect to job performance, a 1980 study of a wide range of sales fields revealed no performance difference between women and men.²⁹ Virtually the same number of women and men performed in the top quarter of sales forces after 6 and 14-month evaluations. After the first 6 months 11% of the women and 8% of the men were in the top quarter, while 47% of both men and women were in the top half.³⁰

THE MYTH: Women have a higher rate of absenteeism than do men.

THE FACTS:

In 1984 Canadian figures on absenteeism show that the amount of time lost by female workers was identical to the amount of time lost by male workers. For both men and women 1.8% were absent due to illness, and the rates for short term absences were 1.7% for males and 2.2% for females. This is not a statistically significant difference.³¹

THE MYTH: Women have higher turnover rates than men of similar occupational level, income and age.

THE FACTS:

Employees, both women and men, leave jobs for a variety of reasons. This, however, does not necessarily indicate a low level of commitment to the labour force.

A study of employees of the Federal Public Service found that women's separation rates, that is their job leaving rates, were slightly higher than men's.³² Three factors must be considered, however:

1. Occupational level – Women's separation rates are lower in the higher level occupations. High separation rates for men and women are found in low level jobs. Since the majority of women are found in such jobs, they may appear to be less stable employees.
2. Income – Separation rates are higher for both sexes in low income groups. Here again, proportionately more women are found.

3. Age – Separation rates are higher amongst younger employees, and a greater proportion of female public servants are in the younger age groups.

If one controls for the above factors, that is, if you compare men and women of similar occupational level, income and age, women are found to be as stable in their employment patterns as their male counterparts. With this in mind it is interesting to note the very positive example of the Warner-Lambert company which has experienced a 20% drop in female turnover rates since it introduced its Affirmative Action Program in 1975.³³

THE MYTH: You can't hire a young woman for a responsible position – she'll just get pregnant and leave.

THE FACTS:

Increasing numbers of women are remaining in the labour force despite the presence of young children in the home. In 1984 64.6% of women in Ontario with children under 16 were in the labour force. The participation rate for women with children under 6 was 59.1%.³⁴

The chief childbearing and childrearing years are those from 20-44. In Ontario these are also the years of women's highest participation in the labour force. In particular, it is important to note that three out of four women between the ages of 25 and 34 are in the labour force.

TABLE THREE Labour Force Participation of Women By Age, Ontario – 1984 ³⁵	
Age	Participation Rate
20-24	77.9%
25-34	73.9%
35-44	73.5%

THE MYTH: Women are not as mobile as men – a husband's job comes first.

THE FACTS:

Over 50% of two-partner families in Ontario have both husband and wife in the labour force. In 1976 almost 2 million men and women in Ontario were part of dual career families.³⁶ These families no longer make decisions regarding relocation solely according to the husband's career needs.

In fact many men are now refusing transfers. In a 1976 study 48% of the male manager/supervisors polled indicated that they would prefer not to move.³⁷

This fact is beginning to change corporate attitudes and policies regarding relocation. As previously noted, 43.4% of working women in Ontario are single, widowed or divorced.³⁸ Such women are able to relocate as easily as men in comparable circumstances.

THE MYTH: Women don't want responsibility or promotion.

THE FACTS:

There is no evidence to indicate that, given equal opportunity, women are less likely to take on responsibility or are less interested in advancement than men.

A study in 1983 of perceived opportunities for advancement found that women in each occupation group see fewer opportunities for advancement than men, and named prospects of advancement as essential to job satisfaction. Ability to influence major decisions of superiors was also cited as a major component of job satisfaction. Males also perceived these two factors to be crucial. In fact, companion surveys in 1977 and 1981 found the causes of declining morale to be roughly the same for male and female workers.³⁹

There is also evidence to suggest that the absence of career advancement opportunities results in an apparent lack of ambition.⁴⁰ Since the majority of women are employed in jobs with either short or non-existent career ladders, it may appear that they have little interest in career advancement. This lack of interest disappears, however, when career opportunities are open to both women and men equally. All workers suffer from a loss of self-esteem and ambition if opportunity for advancement is denied.

THE MYTH: “Employment equity” means that preferential treatment will put unqualified women ahead at the expense of better qualified men!

THE FACTS:

Employment equity in Ontario has only positive implications. It refers to the efforts by employers to ensure equality of access and advancement in the workplace, and embraces education, training and child care as well as positive steps to ensure fairness in hiring and promotion.

A major part of an employment equity program is the collection of data about human resources and the assessment of an organization's structure and policies to determine whether there is any unwitting or systemic discrimination against women in personnel practices.

The next step is to set objectives – not arbitrary quotas. These objectives are geared to suit the size, nature and capability of the individual organization. Following implementation of these objectives, it is imperative that management undertake a periodic review of the program's progress.

Employment equity does not interfere with fair competition. It does ensure that the competition is fair.